STUMPTOWN™

GREG RUCKA • MATTHEW SOUTHWORTH • RICO RENZI

The Case of the Baby in the Velvet Case

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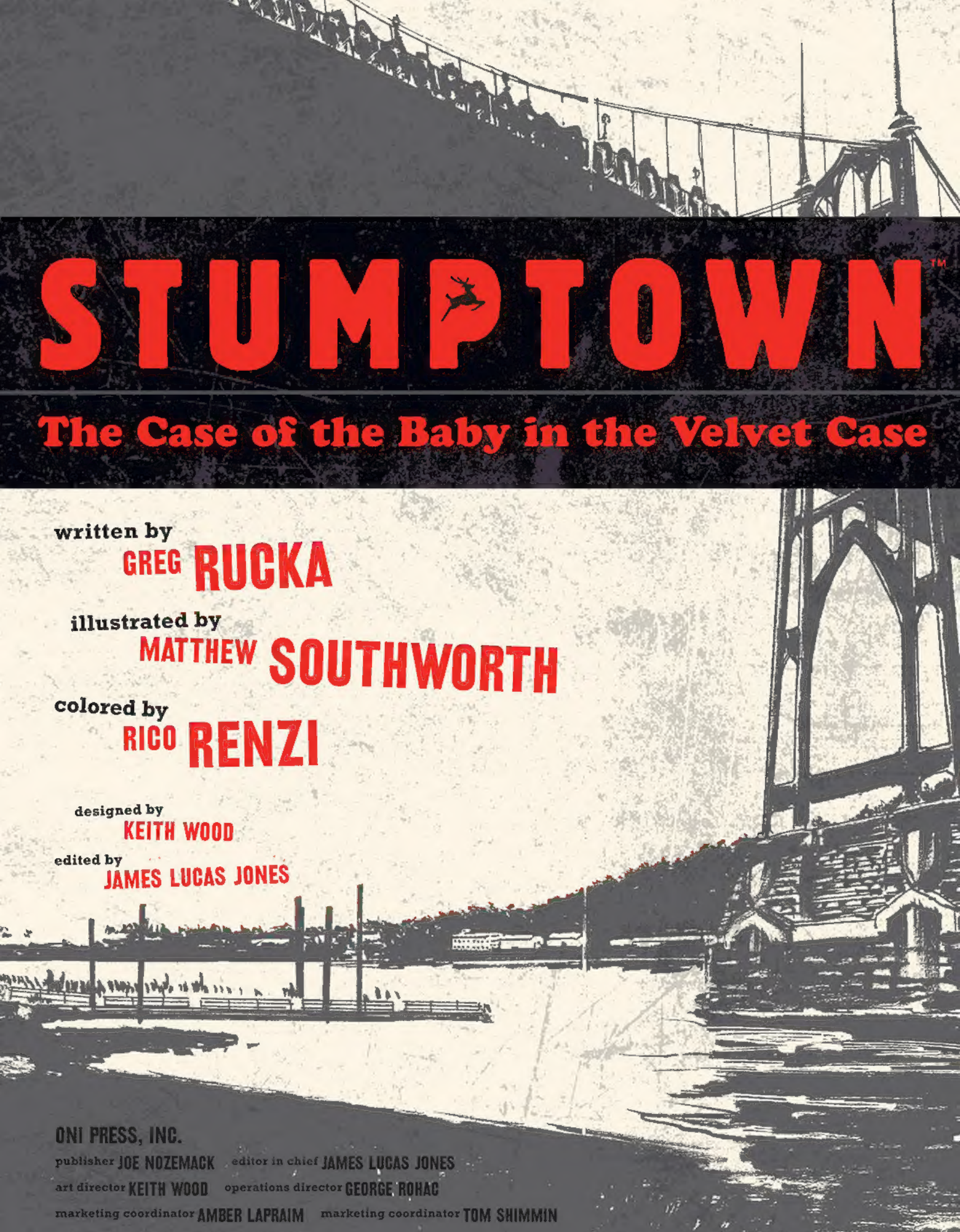

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The Case of the Baby in the Velvet Case

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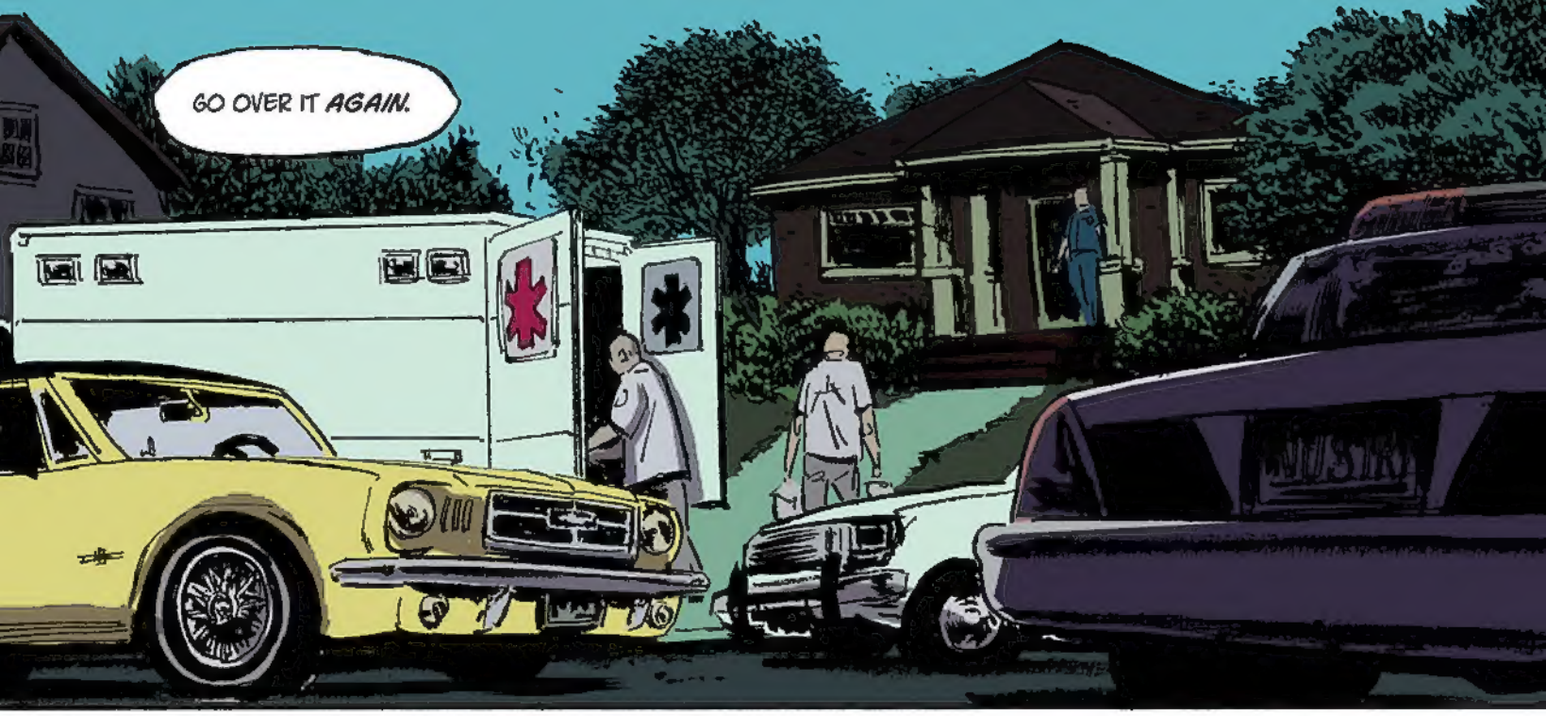
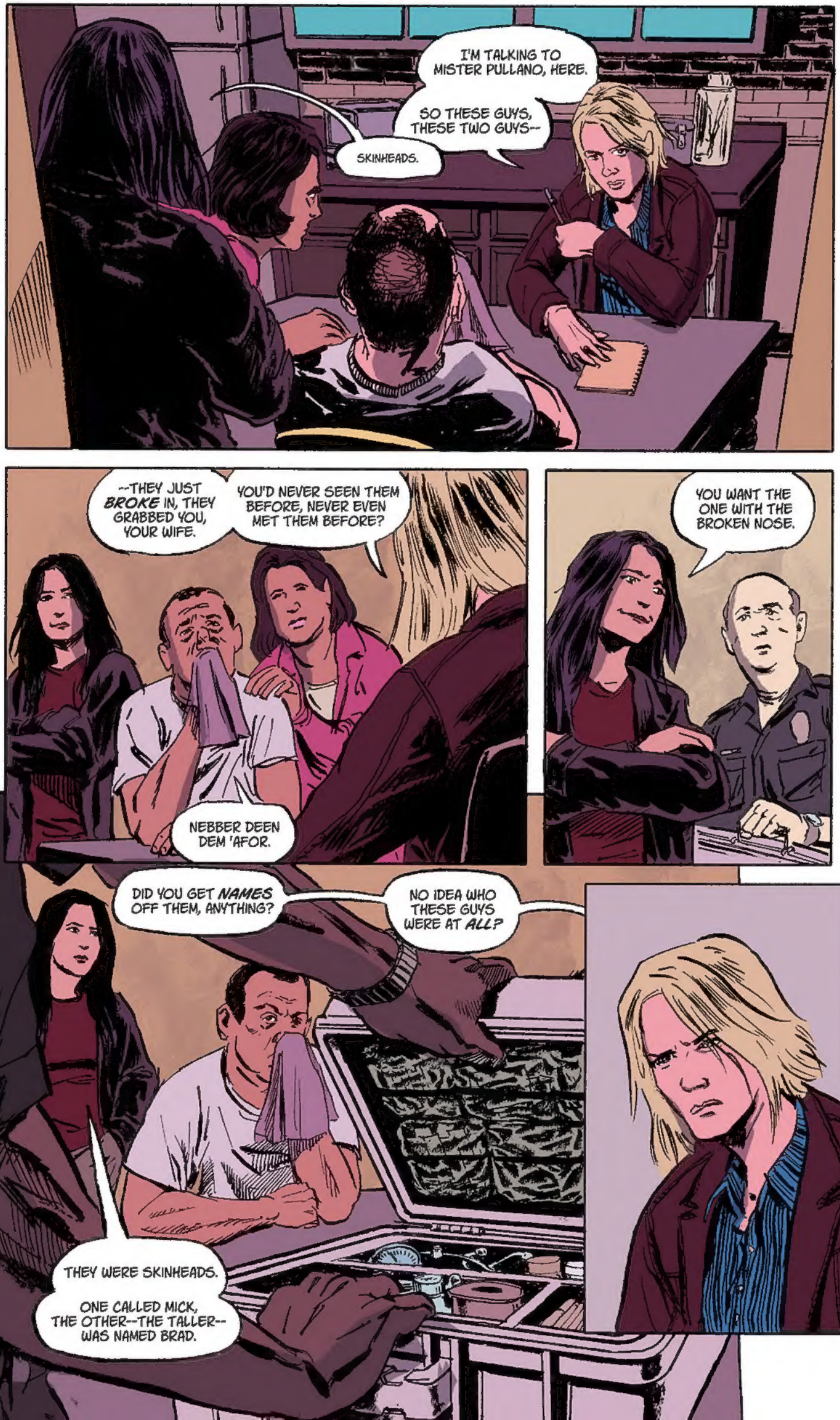
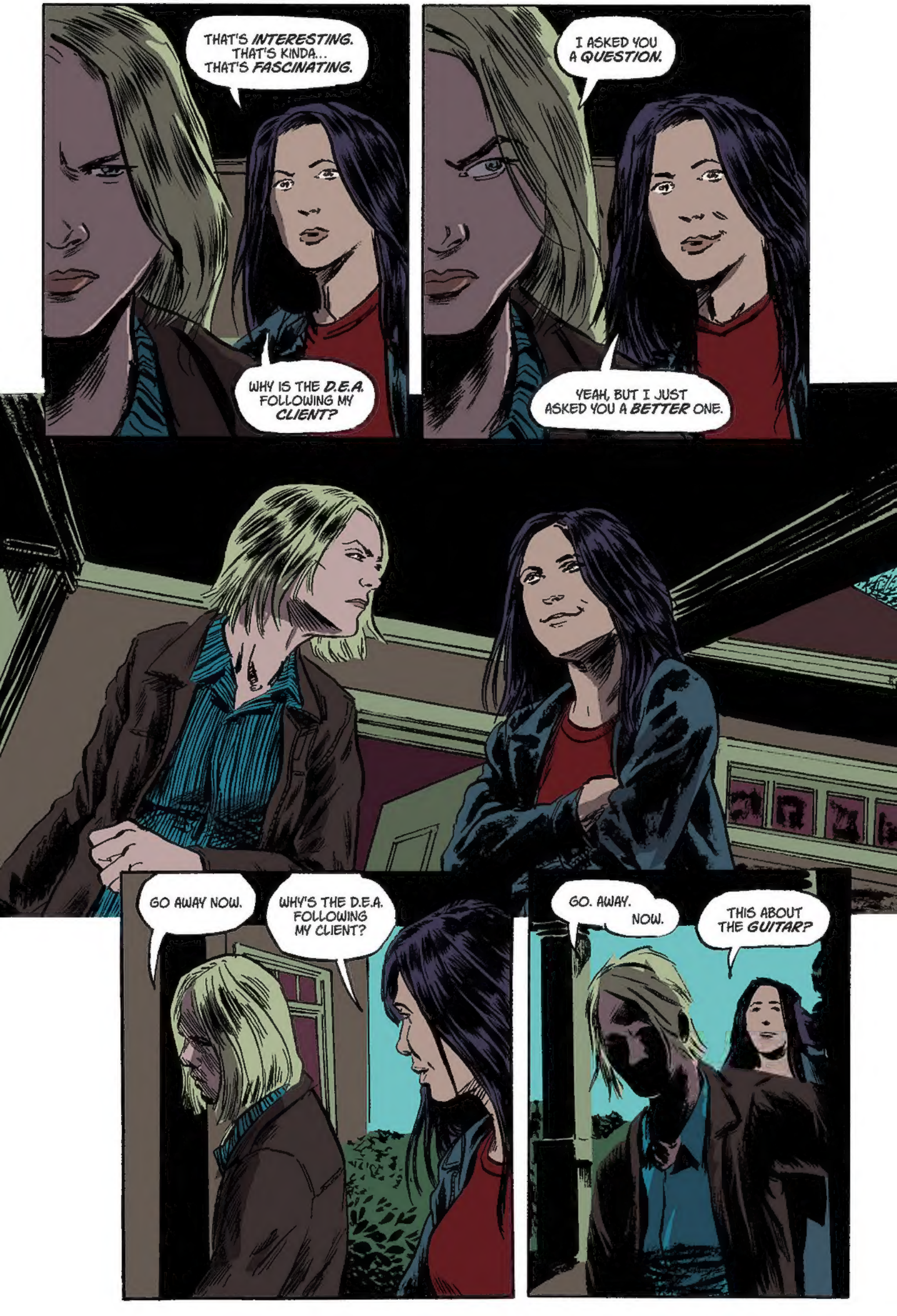


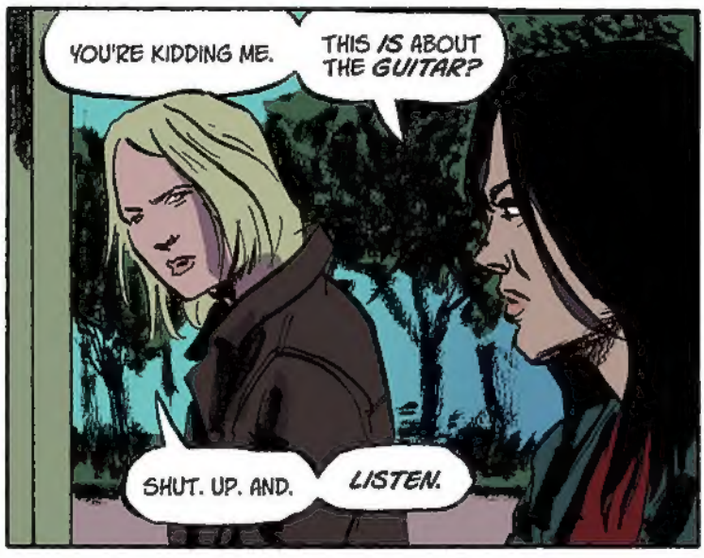
the case of the baby in the velvet case

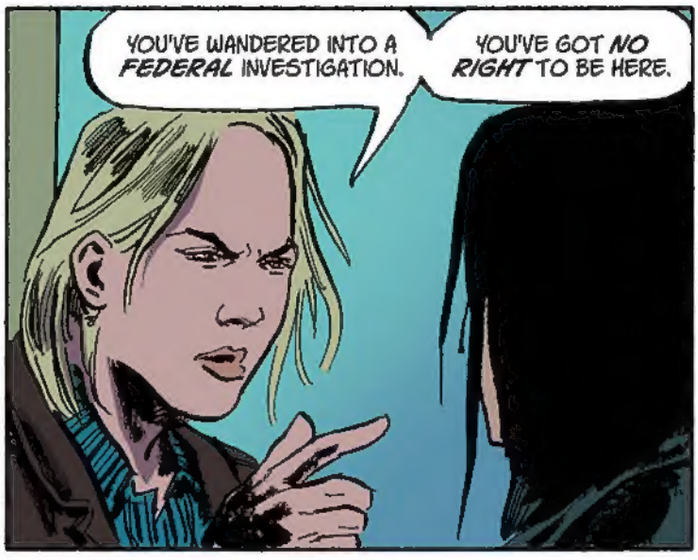
part two

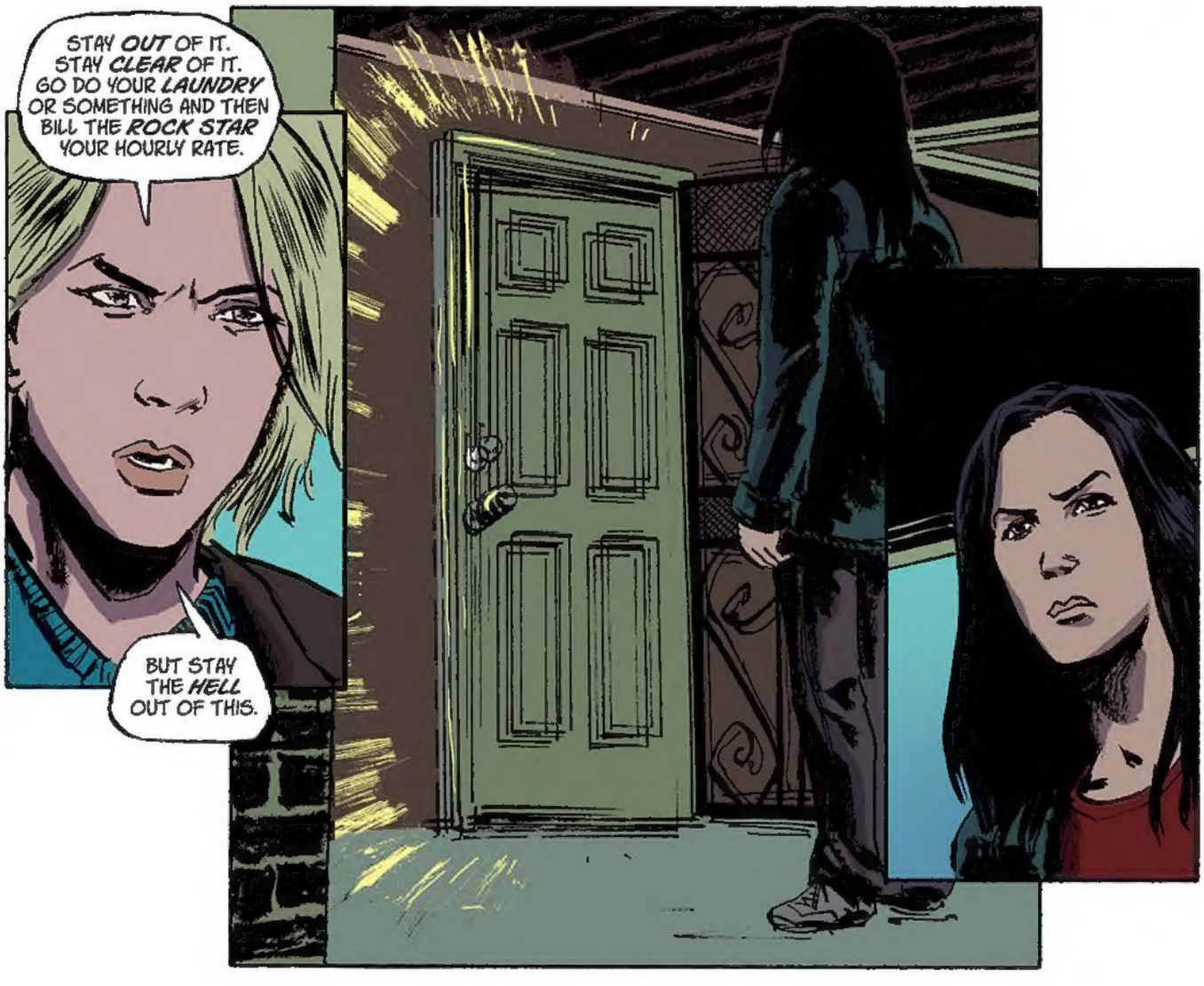

I'M TALKING TO MISTER PULLANO, HERE.
SO THESE GUYS, THESE TWO GUYS--
SKINHEADS.
--THEY JUST *BROKE* IN, THEY GRABBED YOU, YOUR WIFE.
YOU'D NEVER SEEN THEM BEFORE, NEVER EVEN MET THEM BEFORE?
NEBBER DEEN DEM 'AFOR.
YOU WANT THE ONE WITH THE BROKEN NOSE.
DID YOU GET *NAMES* OFF THEM, ANYTHING?
NO IDEA WHO THESE GUYS WERE AT *ALL*?
THEY WERE SKINHEADS.
ONE CALLED MICK, THE OTHER--THE TALLER--WAS NAMED BRAD.

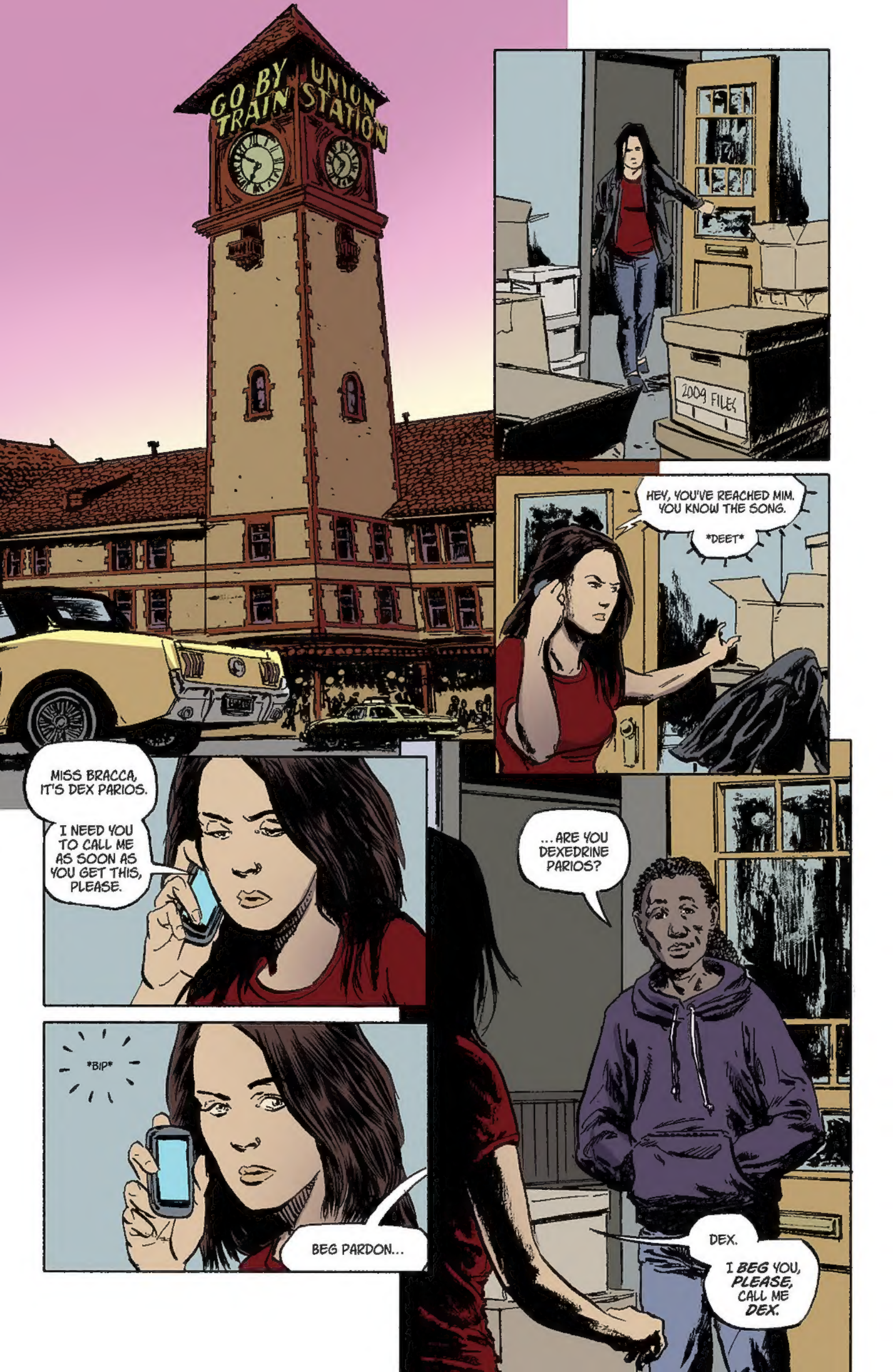
OUTSIDE.
WHAT, ALONE?
OUTSIDE.
YOU A HARD CASE, PARIOS?
OOOH, AGENT CHASE KNOWS MY NAME.
WAIT...
...YOU WERE FOLLOWING ME? RAN MY LICENSE PLATE, MAYBE?
WHY FOLLOW ME?
YOU WERE FOLLOWING BRACCA FIRST. THAT'S IT, ISN'T IT?
THAT HAS TO BE IT.


THAT'S INTERESTING. THAT'S KINDA... THAT'S FASCINATING.
WHY IS THE D.E.A. FOLLOWING MY CLIENT?
I ASKED YOU A QUESTION.
YEAH, BUT I JUST ASKED YOU A BETTER ONE.
GO AWAY NOW.
WHY'S THE D.E.A. FOLLOWING MY CLIENT?
GO. AWAY. NOW.
THIS ABOUT THE GUITAR?


YOU'RE KIDDING ME.
THIS *IS* ABOUT THE *GUITAR?*
SHUT. UP. AND.
LISTEN.


YOU'VE WANDERED INTO A *FEDERAL* INVESTIGATION.
YOU'VE GOT *NO RIGHT* TO BE HERE.


STAY *OUT* OF IT. STAY *CLEAR* OF IT. GO DO YOUR *LAUNDRY* OR SOMETHING AND THEN BILL THE *ROCK STAR* YOUR HOURLY RATE.
BUT STAY THE *HELL* OUT OF THIS.


GO BY TRAIN
UNION STATION
2009 FILES
HEY, YOU'VE REACHED MIM. YOU KNOW THE SONG.
DEET
MISS BRACCA, IT'S DEX PARIOS.
I NEED YOU TO CALL ME AS SOON AS YOU GET THIS, PLEASE.
...ARE YOU DEXEDRINE PARIOS?
BIP
BEG PARDON...
DEX.
I BEG YOU, PLEASE, CALL ME DEX.

I'M DAVID MAYES.
I'M IN TAILHOOK WITH MIM BRACCA.
CLICK. RIGHT!
STAGE NAME, JUST... YOU KNOW, DAVID.
DAVID, SURE. NICE TO MEET YOU, DAVID.
TAKE A, AH... WELL, IF YOU CAN FIND A SEAT, AT LEAST...
STANDING'S FINE, THANKS.
HOW CAN I HELP YOU?
I TALKED TO MIM. SHE SAYS YOU'RE LOOKING FOR HER BABY FOR HER.
DID SHE?

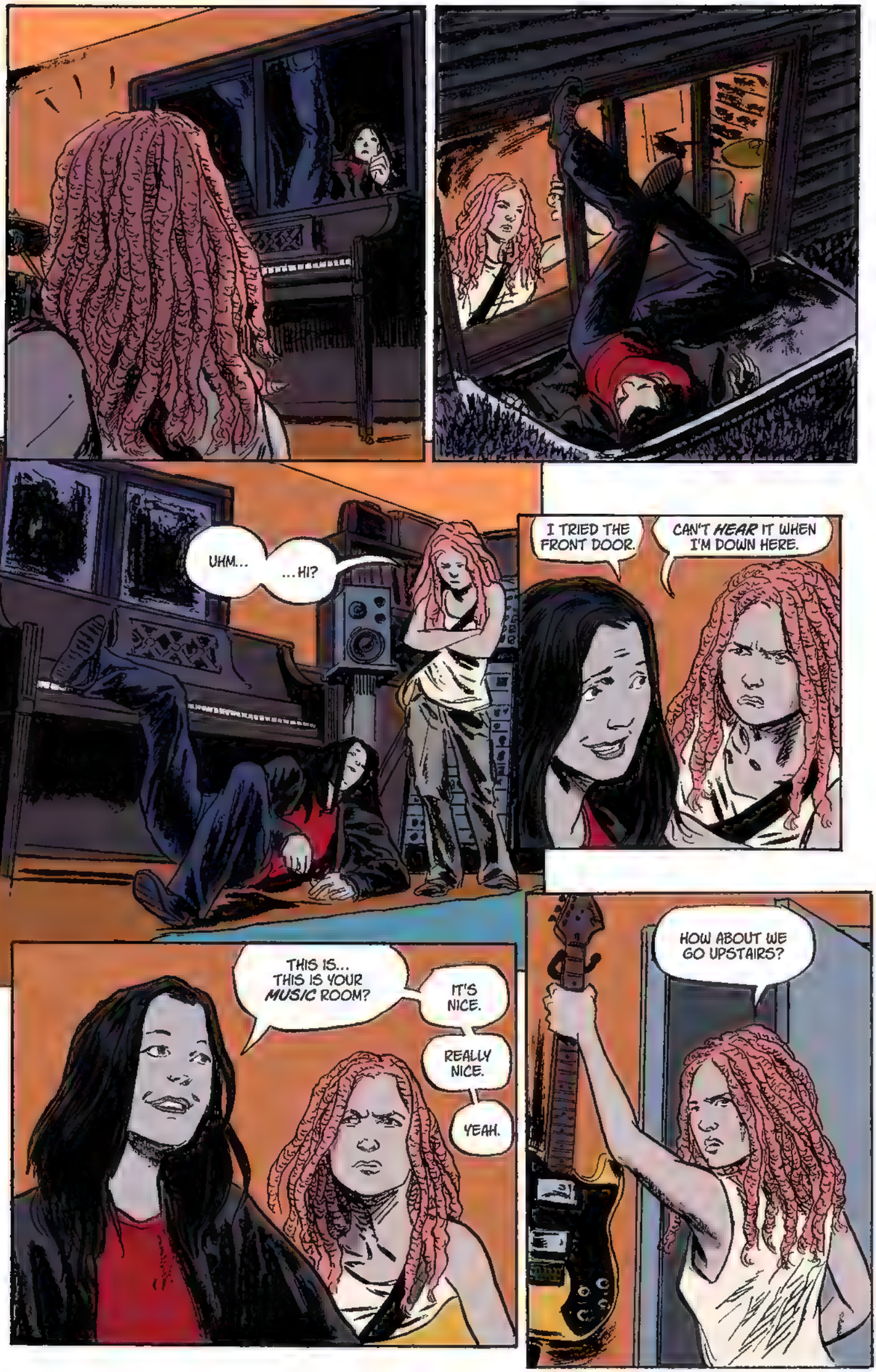
HEH.
YEAH, DISCRETION IS GOOD, I APPRECIATE THAT.
NOT A LOT OF DISCRETION IN TAILHOOK?
DEPENDS WHO YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.
ME? I'M VERY DISCREET.
AND MIM?
SHE'S NEVER BEEN COMFORTABLE WITH ATTENTION. NO IDEA HOW TO DEAL WITH IT, EVEN NOW.
NOW, VAN... THAT GIRL WAS BORN FOR THE SPOTLIGHT.
THIS YOU?
YEAH, ABOUT FIVE YEARS AGO.
IRAQ OR AFGHANISTAN?
YES.
REGULAR ARMY OR RESERVES?

YOU DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT MY PAST, MISTER MAYES.
DAVID.
AND YOU'RE SURE OF THAT, ARE YOU?
LOOK, IF YOU'RE HERE TO ASK ABOUT MY INVESTIGATION, I CAN'T REALLY--
NAH, I KINDA WANTED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT MIM, IS ALL.
YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT HER?
WORRY ABOUT HER ALL THE TIME. VAN, SHE'S HIGH-MAINTENANCE. GRAHAM--OUR MANAGER--HE'S GOT BOTH HANDS FULL TRYING TO KEEP HER HAPPY.
ME, I'M EASY, YOU KNOW? PLAY MY DRUMS, DRINK MY BEER, MAYBE WASTE A DAY PLAYING VIDEO GAMES. LOW MAINTENANCE. BUT MIM...
...COUPLE YEARS AGO THINGS GOT BAD FOR HER. HER OLD MAN WAS ACCUSED OF MURDERING HER BROTHER, SHE WAS BEING STALKED, NAKED PICTURES POSTED ONLINE, ALL OF IT.
...I DON'T WANT TO SEE HER GO THROUGH ANYTHING LIKE THAT AGAIN.
AND YOU THINK THE GUITAR DISAPPEARING MIGHT BE THE START OF HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF?
THINK IT? NO.
FEAR IT? HELL, YEAH.

IT COULD BE NOTHING, YOU KNOW? FANS DO WEIRD SHIT. I MEAN, REALLY WEIRD SHIT.
OR IT COULD BE SOMEONE TRYING TO MAKE A BUCK. A LOT OF MUSICIANS GET THEIR INSTRUMENTS STOLEN...
... PUT UP ON E-BAY, SOLD TO PRIVATE COLLECTORS.
HELL, ONE OF THE DECEMBERISTS HAD AN ACCORDION STOLEN LAST YEAR AND HELD FOR RANSOM.
HAPPENS MORE THAN YOU'D THINK.
YOU THINK YOU COULD GET ME A LIST OF THE SUPPORT CREW FOR THIS LAST TOUR? NAMES AND NUMBERS, LIKE THAT?
ROADIES, YOU MEAN? SHOULD BE ABLE TO, YEAH.
YOU THINK ONE OF THEM TOOK THE BABY?
OR MAYBE SAW WHOEVER DID.
THIS IS THE NUMBER FOR MY CELL, AND MY EMAIL, TOO. IF YOU CAN SEND ME THE LIST...
... AS SOON AS YOU GET IT...
I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO FOR YOU.

THANKS FOR THE TIME.
NICE TO MEET YOU, DEX.
YEAH...
...YOU, TOO.
DA-DEE DA-DA-DA-DEE-DA

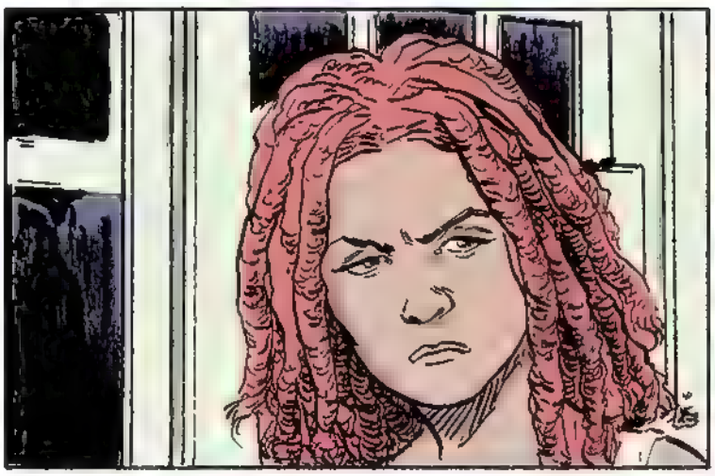
NOK
NOK
NOK
NOK


UHM...
...HI?
I TRIED THE FRONT DOOR.
CAN'T *HEAR* IT WHEN I'M DOWN HERE.
THIS IS... THIS IS YOUR *MUSIC* ROOM?
IT'S NICE.
REALLY NICE.
YEAH.
HOW ABOUT WE GO UPSTAIRS?

BUT... WHY WOULD THE *D.E.A.* BE FOLLOWING *ME?*

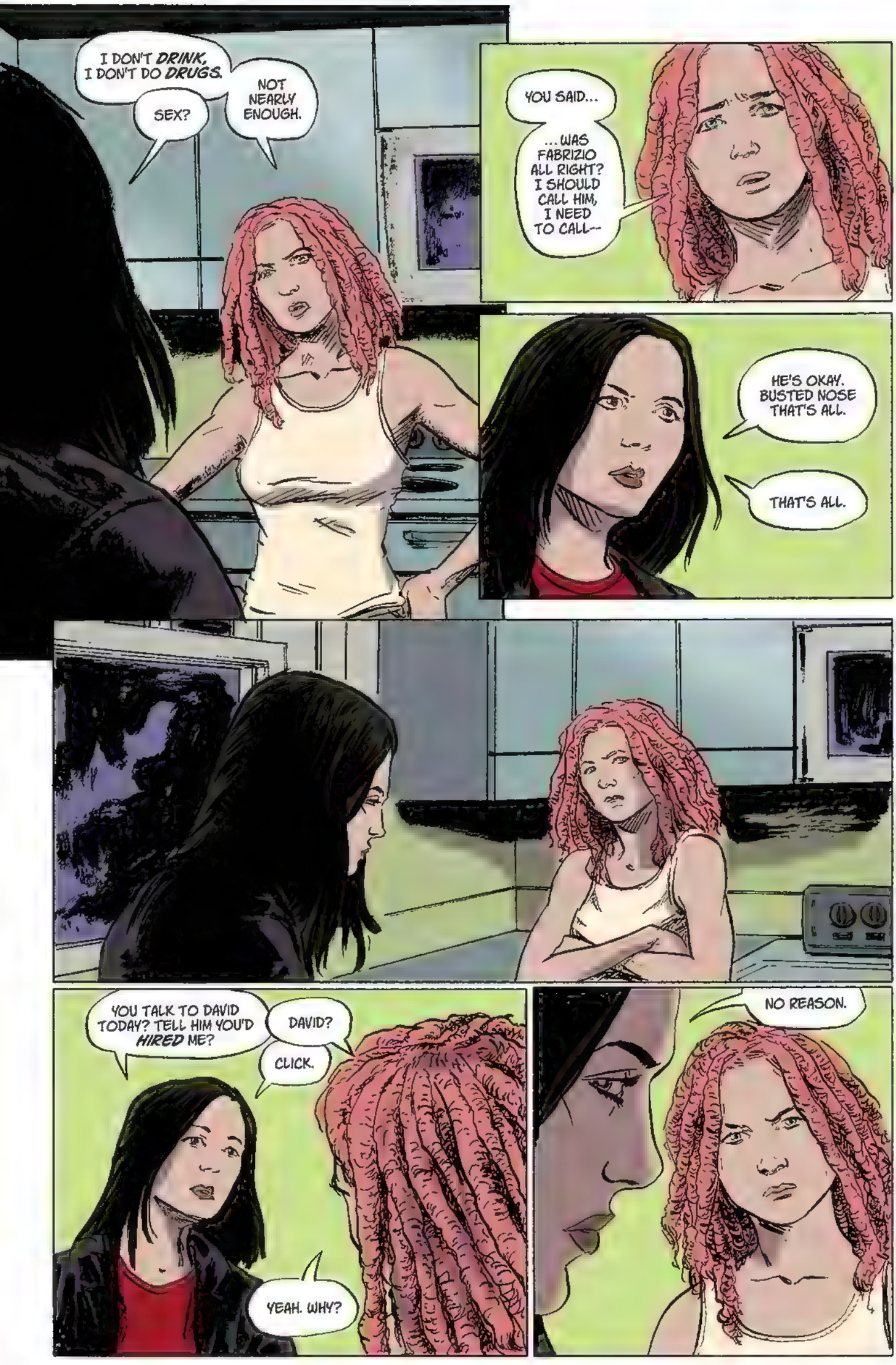
I WAS HOPING YOU COULD ANSWER THAT, ACTUALLY.
I DON'T EVEN *USE* DRUGS!

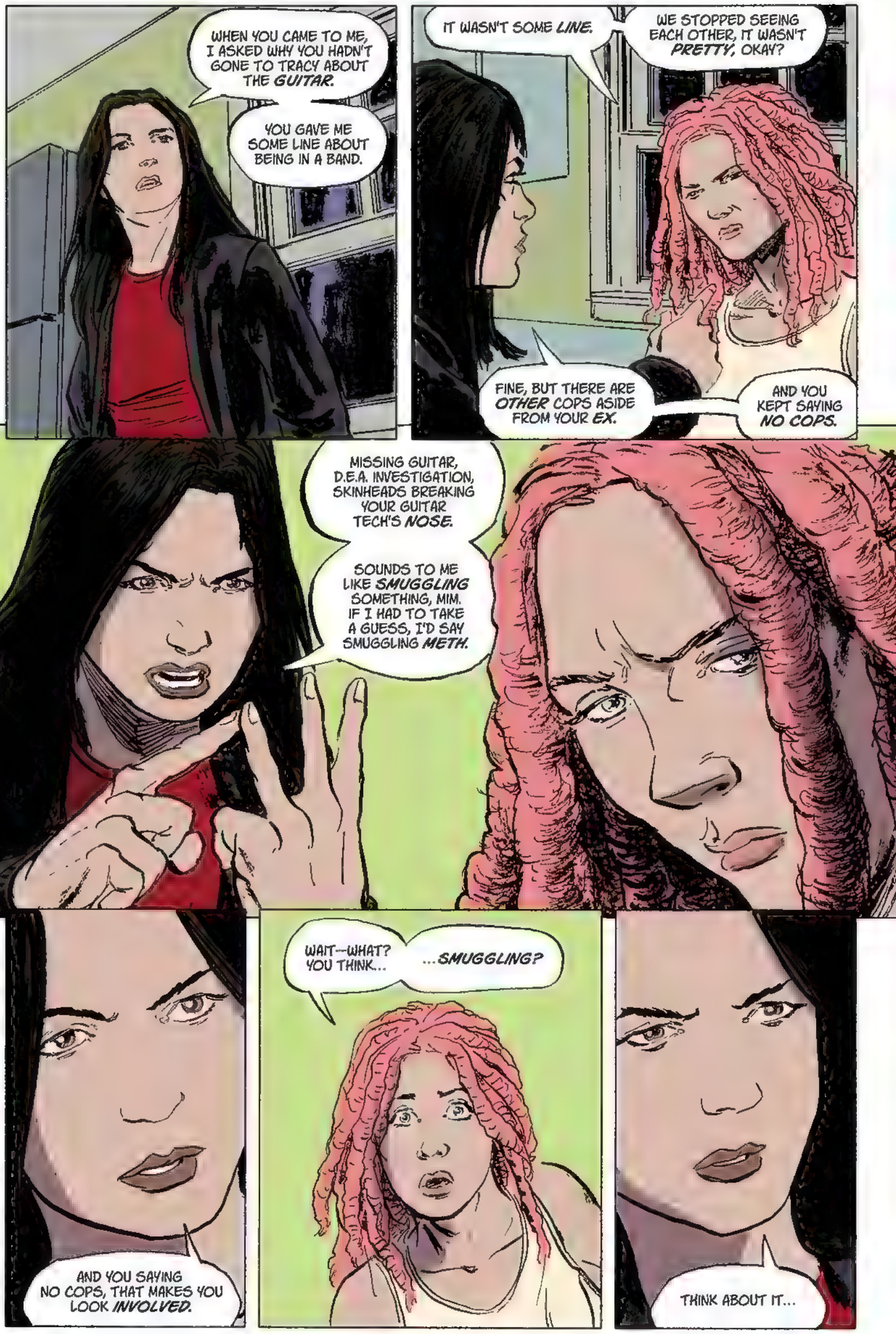
I *DON'T!*
YOU'RE A ROCK STAR.
I'M A *MUSICIAN.*
A MUSICIAN WHO PLAYS *SOLD-OUT* CONCERTS AROUND THE WORLD AND HAS MULTI-MILLION SELLING *ALBUMS.*



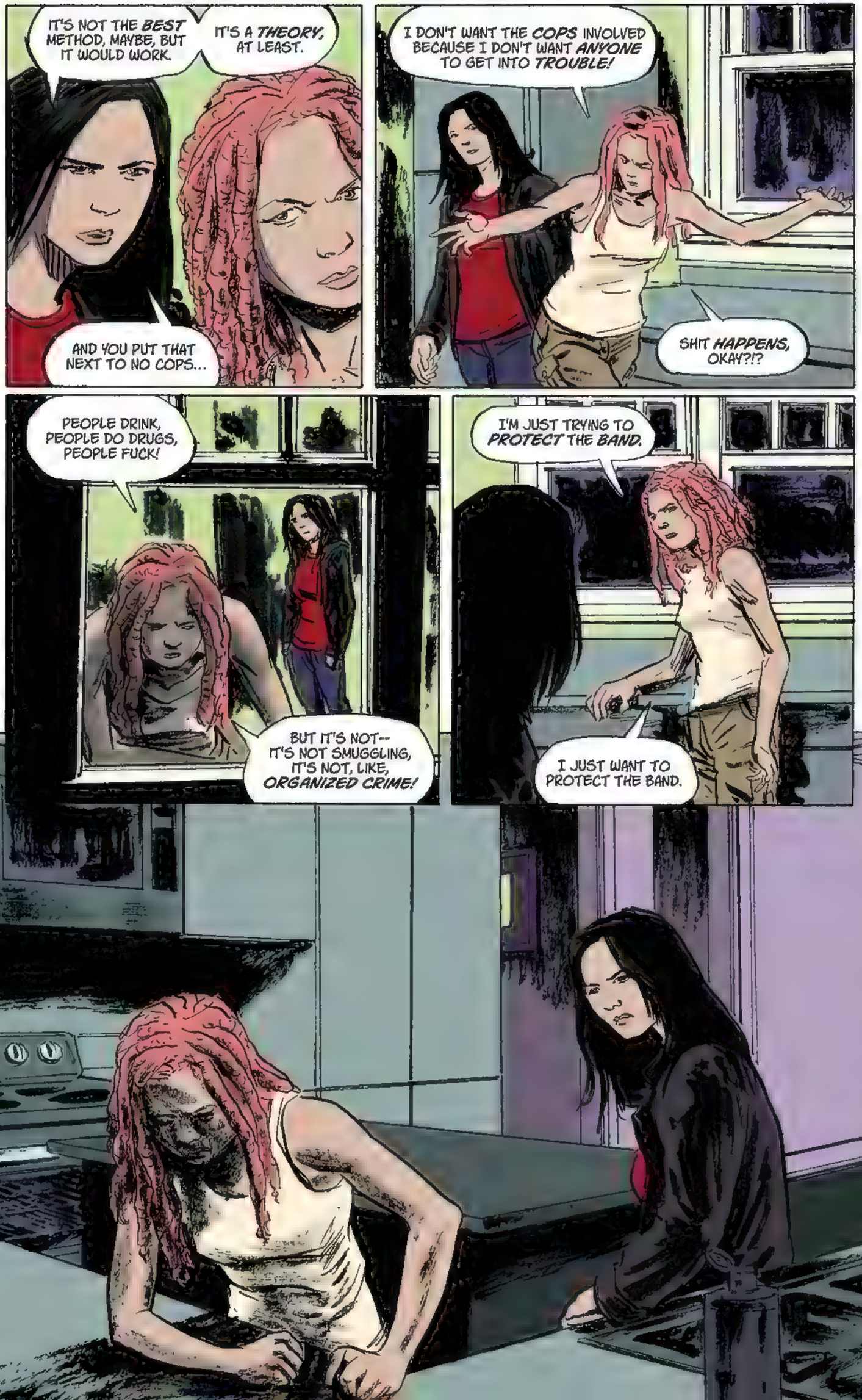
I'M AN ALCOHOLIC.

BEEN SOBER JUST OVER THREE AND A HALF YEARS, NOW.


I DON'T DRINK, I DON'T DO DRUGS.
SEX?
NOT NEARLY ENOUGH.
YOU SAID...
...WAS FABRIZIO ALL RIGHT? I SHOULD CALL HIM, I NEED TO CALL--
HE'S OKAY. BUSTED NOSE THAT'S ALL.
THAT'S ALL.
YOU TALK TO DAVID TODAY? TELL HIM YOU'D HIRED ME?
DAVID?
CLICK.
YEAH. WHY?
NO REASON.


WHEN YOU CAME TO ME, I ASKED WHY YOU HADN'T GONE TO TRACY ABOUT THE GUITAR.
YOU GAVE ME SOME LINE ABOUT BEING IN A BAND.
IT WASN'T SOME LINE.
WE STOPPED SEEING EACH OTHER, IT WASN'T PRETTY, OKAY?
FINE, BUT THERE ARE OTHER COPS ASIDE FROM YOUR EX.
AND YOU KEPT SAYING NO COPS.
MISSING GUITAR, D.E.A. INVESTIGATION, SKINHEADS BREAKING YOUR GUITAR TECH'S NOSE.
SOUNDS TO ME LIKE SMUGGLING SOMETHING, MIM. IF I HAD TO TAKE A GUESS, I'D SAY SMUGGLING METH.
AND YOU SAYING NO COPS, THAT MAKES YOU LOOK INVOLVED.
WAIT--WHAT? YOU THINK...
...SMUGGLING?
THINK ABOUT IT...

"... YOU'VE BEEN TOURING FOR WHAT, JUST UNDER A YEAR? ALL AROUND THE COUNTRY, ALL AROUND THE WORLD, MAYBE?
"... ALL THOSE CASES, ALL THOSE CONTAINERS, ALL THOSE CITIES.
"ALL THAT EQUIPMENT'S GOT TO COME WITH YOU...
"EASY TO MAKE A CONNECTION IN ONE TOWN OR ANOTHER, MAYBE GIVE SOMEONE A BACKSTAGE PASS OR SOMETHING.
CREW
"MAKE THE DEAL BEFORE, DURING, OR AFTER THE SHOW...
"... JUST WAIT UNTIL THE BREAKDOWN IS FINISHED, WAIT FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT...
CREW
"... TUCK IT INTO SOME CORNER OF SOME BOX, HIDE IT UNDER SOMETHING, AND THERE YOU GO."
PARAMOUNT
PACKWOOD
PARAMOUNT
PEG PRESENTS
TAIL HOOK
THE CAPILLARIES
JUNE 7 8PM


IT'S NOT THE BEST METHOD, MAYBE, BUT IT WOULD WORK.
IT'S A THEORY, AT LEAST.
AND YOU PUT THAT NEXT TO NO COPS...
I DON'T WANT THE COPS INVOLVED BECAUSE I DON'T WANT ANYONE TO GET INTO TROUBLE!
SHIT HAPPENS, OKAY?!?
PEOPLE DRINK, PEOPLE DO DRUGS, PEOPLE FUCK!
BUT IT'S NOT-- IT'S NOT SMUGGLING, IT'S NOT, LIKE, ORGANIZED CRIME!
I'M JUST TRYING TO PROTECT THE BAND.
I JUST WANT TO PROTECT THE BAND.

I DON'T NEED THE D.E.A. CRAWLING UP MY ASS FOR A *CLIENT* WHO WON'T GIVE ME THE *TRUTH,* MIM.
IF THERE'S SOMEONE YOU'RE TRYING TO *PROTECT,* I NEED TO KNOW THAT.
IF THERE'S SOMETHING YOU'RE *NOT* TELLING ME, I NEED TO HEAR IT *NOW.*
I'M *NOT,* I SWEAR TO *GOD.*
I JUST WANT MY BABY BACK.
I'VE GOT TO GET HOME, CHECK ON MY BROTHER.
I'LL CALL YOU TOMORROW.

HEY! ANSEL! GREY! I'M *HOME!*
L-L-*LISTEN,* DEX!
GREY IS PLAYING YOUR NEW GUITAR!
MY--WAIT, WHAT?
DEX! HOPE YOU DON'T MIND...
UP-UP *STAIRS,* DEX!
...I'VE NEVER GOTTEN TO PLAY ONE LIKE *THIS* BEFORE.
WHEN'D YOU START PLAYING GUITAR?

WHY P.I.? PART TWO — DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS

One of the many reasons I fell in love with the private eye as a genre, as a character, was because of its versatility, a versatility that goes directly to why I will argue until I am blue in the face that this is a uniquely American form in its inception. Because the PI can be anybody.

Find a mystery bookshop, a store like Murder by the Book in Portland, Oregon, or Murder by the Book in Houston, Texas, or Mysterious Galaxy in San Diego, or Seattle Mystery Bookstore in... well, that one's kinda easy to find. Or just walk into your local independent, or, if you must, your big box store, and take a look at what you find under mystery. Take a look at the long line of detectives. Take a look at the private eyes—

> —a moment, here, to define terms. When I say "private eye" I am referring to a type of protagonist, and not a licensed private investigator alone. Many private eye novels feature licensed detectives, like Dex; many do not. I would qualify Craig Johnson's *Longmire* novels, for instance, as private eye stories and not procedurals, even though Walt is Sheriff of Absaroka County. I'll get to my reasons in a moment, but if you're still mulling the cowboy-PI connection as discussed in Part One, and you're looking for proof, then Exhibit A is certainly Dashiell Hammet's *Red Harvest*, and Exhibit B is Craig Johnson's *Longmire* series—

—and you'll see that they share many of the same traits, but they come from all walks of life. The PI, who started the 20th Century as a white male, has become... well, American. The PI is a man. The PI is a woman. The PI is a nun. The PI is a rabbi. The PI is an ex-cop, or a dog-walker, or a cabbie, or a social worker, or a teacher, or a musician. The PI is straight, queer, trans, bi. The PI is asian, latino, Indian, black. The PI is any of a million combinations of the American experience, from blue-blood Plymouth descendent to first-generation immigrant. The PI is any—every—face you will find in this country.

And this is important, because the PI is here to tell us something. The PI is here to comment on our society. The PI is here to root out the truth, ugly though it may be, and direct the light of knowledge, if not the fire of cleansing.

This brings us back to where I left us off last time. The idea that the PI stands alone. In American literature, that lone figure—be she adventurer, entrepreneur, soldier, homesteader, cowboy, or detective—holds a place of honor, is emblematic in the belief of the individual, and the distrust of Authority. In the literature there's a ready trope at work. The lone-wolf who has trouble following orders. Chandler's Marlowe used to work for the DA's Office. Not anymore. Why?

Authority issues.

But note, please: suspicion of authority is not the same as an abandonment of society.

This is why the PI stands alone. Her job, that ferreting of the truth, that shining of the light, is a job that can only be performed from outside, from a position that the literary critics amongst you have already identified. These are liminal characters, men and women who have, for one reason or another, divorced themselves from the rest of their society, and in doing so, now stand at its border. Never entirely an outsider, never entirely belonging, she looks in, and thus has a vantage point to see what we ourselves may be blind to. She looks in, and she sees the flaws and the faults and the failings.

Raymond Chandler, by many considered the godfather of the modern PI, wrote a brilliant essay called "The Simple Art of Murder." It is in this essay that he lays out both the nature of the PI story, and the nature of the PI. Of the story, he argues that there must be a murder (and if you've read the first *Stumptown*, you'll have noted that I disagree with this particular assertion). Of the PI, he argues that he "must be the best man in his world, and a good enough man for any world."

The world has changed, and thus our detective. The crime has not. Any society where murder can take place, where a life can be stolen, is a society flawed. By operating outside the boundaries of this society, the PI becomes the agent not only of justice or truth, but of warning. Something is wrong here, the PI says. Something is wrong, and it cannot be ignored.

Thus, the PI must operate alone. The PI must be able to move outside of the bounds of society, including, occasionally (or frequently) outside the bounds of the law. This is why the PI must be "the best man in his world." The PI must be someone whose moral compass is unerring, and whose sense of right and wrong, of justice and injustice, is incorruptible. Where society fails, the PI stands up to make it right. The word we use for this is "honor," and that is why it figures so prominently in the literature. This is why the PI has a "code." She must be beyond reproach. A failure at love, at business, at art, all is forgiven of the PI. But never a failure of honor.

Standing alone does not mean standing without friends or assistance, however. Such a divorce from the rest of society runs the risk of breaking the aforementioned compass. It is the supporting cast that gives the PI their anchor, and it is that supporting cast that provides the PI her strength and grounding.

Which I'll bore you with further in Part Three, next month.

GREG RUCKA, PORTLAND, OREGON

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